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ABSTRACT

The speech communication discipline seems to be stuck in status quo. The current climate of the discipline K-12 is one that is not mobilized for the future. However, a paradigm shift within the Speech Communication Association may be evolving in the creation of a model for the process for development of assessment strategies and instruments. Educators know that assessment drives the curriculum. Currently, elementary education majors seem to have little background in the teaching of speaking/listening skills, and therefore, do not spend much time integrating them into the curriculum. In addition, few states now have an assessment measure to test speech communication standards. A plan to mobilize the discipline to adopt and disseminate an agreed upon set of K-12 standards and assessment strategies, along with teacher training in these methods and curriculum supervision can turn the phantom K-12 curriculum into a real curriculum. (Contains six references.) (CR)

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A VISION FOR THE FUTURE:

THE CREATION OF K-12 STANDARDS IN ORAL COMMUNICATION CURRICULUM

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A VISION FOR THE FUTURE:
THE CREATION OF K-12 STANDARDS IN ORAL COMMUNICATION CURRICULUM

For the first time, I cannot go back from where I came and I cannot move forward as I am. My situation exists because my discipline is stuck in the status quo, which cannot continue but will not move forward, because it is not quite mobilized for the future. Who am I? I am speech communication education K-12, a phantom some educators are chasing.

Some "would be" rescuers have nobly and courageously studied me, published about me and argued in defense of me to colleagues, administrators, legislators, school boards, college and university officials, state boards, state departments of education and the U.S. Department of Education. These "want to be" rescuers frequently work individually and/or in small groups to include me in such things as units of study in Language Arts, new and revised courses, state competencies and standards, expanded activity programs, textbooks, journal articles, teacher's conferences, seminars, proposals, teacher training programs and community service projects. All of these efforts are important but cannot save me.

A strong rescuer could be the assessment movement, because educators know that assessment drives education. The greatest potential rescuer will have to be my discipline and the Speech Communication Association, my learned society, who must mobilize the strengths of multitudes of scholars who will, together, defend me, nurture me and cause me to flourish.

This allegory to speech communication education K-12 encapsulates the dilemma that has existed too long. Too few in SCA have taken notice of K-12 education in the discipline, which is a foundation and began with the exquisite schools for young boys (as young as six years old) in the classical Greek and Roman period. What scholars in the discipline cannot respect the precepts of Aristotle and the great Roman teacher, Quintillian? Parallels exist between Greco-Roman education and American education. The recognition of the need for all citizens/students to develop skills in speaking and listening, critical thinking and reasoning, and solving problems in society and careers are

just a few skills traditionally addressed in speech communication education curricula over centuries and decades.

In this paper, the writer will analyze and address the current climate of the discipline K-12, the paradigm shift and a plan to mobilize the discipline to adopt and disseminate an agreed upon set of K-12 standards and assessment strategies. At this convention, the Committee on Assessment has sponsored a workshop to deal with most of the issues that will be discussed in this paper.

Currently, few states certify speech communication specialists below the seventh grade, but K-6 speaking and listening skills are included in Language Arts. The courses that certified specialists 7-12 teach are not often required courses, for only a few states have even one required speech communication course. If a course is required, it is standard in high school for it to be one semester as part of the English curriculum or a few elective course options and/or units in Language Arts in junior high school. Even though speaking and listening skills are considered basic skills via legislative mandates, little has changed in actual time spent teaching these skills. According to a recent article in *Communication Education*, Barnes and Hayes (1995) discussed the fact that even teachers trained in speech communication courses in a college/university did not increase the amount of time teaching those skills. Could it be that because the state does not have an assessment measure to test those standards, teachers will instead spend more time on standards that are being assessed? Even though speaking and listening standards exist, without qualified as well as certified teachers, courses and requirements that are congruent, along with assessment that can be inexpensively administered, those standards will be given less emphasis in actual teaching time or they will be omitted.

Another issue is teacher training and curriculum supervision. The SCA publication "Teacher Certification and Preparation Standards" (1989) replaced a 1975 and 1978 document and identifies objectives for several categories of teachers. While it identifies skills that <u>all teachers</u> should have, few Language Arts teachers at the elementary level, much less elementary teachers of other discipline emphases have courses in communication beyond the basic required course. Specialists in Language

Arts who go on to graduate programs to become directors of curriculum rarely have courses dealing with improved instruction in speaking and listening skills. The emphasis continues to be reading and writing skills for those in supervisory positions. How can an SCA document have an impact on or influence non-member disciplines? How can the skills gain favor in Language Arts curriculum?

Similarly, the problem exists in traditional programs for English majors who are predominantly certified to teach Language Arts 7-12. Most have taken the minimum general education or core curriculum communication course(s). Since Language Arts skills are inclusive K-12, English majors are responsible for 7-12 speaking and listening instruction without preparation. When an institution of higher education creates the major, and that major meets certification standards of the state, there is no motivation to change a particular course of study, especially if it compromises the traditional major. Why are states continuing to certify English majors as Language Arts instructors without adequate course work in oral communication? Oral communication skills have been trivialized through omission throughout the K-12 curriculum, teacher training and certification.

Furthermore, elective courses in high school may not teach basic speaking and listening competencies either. Many of these courses are preparing students for competitive co-curricular programs, where instruction is to prepare entries for competition. Competencies and skills in group communication, interpersonal and intrapersonal communication, listening and many more areas of study may not be systematically taught. Without assessment of these areas, even the discipline does not know whether minimum levels of skills are taught.

To summarize the dilemma, elementary education majors seem to have little background in the teaching of speaking and listening skills; therefore, do not spend much time integrating them into the curriculum. Elementary school curriculum directors in Language Arts seem to have little background in speaking and listening instruction, therefore, do not influence teachers to include more instruction in them. English majors, while certified to teach speaking and listening 7-12 seem to have minimal course work that qualifies them for instruction in those skills. These are some reasons that speaking

and listening instruction lags or is omitted. On that basis, acceptable oral communication instruction K-12 seems to be a phantom curriculum.

While K-12 competencies and skills, standards and/or performance objectives have proliferated at all levels, it is assessment that drives the curriculum. The relationship between the learned society and assessment of outcomes is motivated by the relationship between accreditation agencies and accountability. If the learned society does not provide standards and acceptable assessment of outcomes strategies, accreditation agencies cannot validate that the educational unit is accountable. It is the checks and balance system of education; subsequently, each agency, though autonomous, must legitimize the other. The relationships are interdependent and form the basis for a revolutionary paradigm shift driven by accountability and the outcomes of education. The paradigm shift has not yet reached deeply enough into the educational environment. Its effect is still at the surface where the entire community has not yet shown ownership of the paradigm or accepted the responsibilities they bear to legitimize the discipline.

The writer has participated in the evolution of the new paradigm shift that occurred within SCA sponsored conferences. These conferences have begun the process to build ownership of assessment. Early on, the Educational Policies Board passed a set of exit competencies and skills for the undergraduate sophomore level that was published in the early 1980s. These were the basis for the "Wingspread" summer conference in 1987 in Colorado Springs, Colorado where they were discussed and embellished (Quianthy, 1990). Next, a conference that focused on K-Post-secondary education was held in 1988 in Flagstaff, Arizona (Cooper and Galvin, 1988). It was there that assessment was addressed by a small group led by Phil Backlund. Each of the, initially, four people had written papers on various topics related to assessment, but when the issues were presented to the entire conference, they were so overwhelming that a proposal passed to hold another SCA summer conference on assessment. Phil Backlund organized the conference that was held in Denver, Colorado in 1990. Numerous products for development of assessment in the discipline evolved. But

more importantly, a model for the process for development of assessment strategies and instruments evolved.

The process involves first the development of standards or competencies and skills that are accepted through a consensus of the community of scholars they effect. In some cases, as with the sophomore undergraduate exit competencies and skills, a small, powerful group (EPB) created the standards and the group who developed them further stayed within that mandated framework. In the case of K-12 standards, many documents have been written by leading scholars in that area, but the persons they effect are not available to develop a consensus. However, without these standards, the discipline cannot move forward with assessment and without assessment methods based on a discipline-wide set of standards, accreditation agencies will find any outcomes data or interpretation flawed. Additionally, without strong assessment of outcomes strategies and instruments, the skills will not be taught, as explained earlier.

Furthermore, the development of "The Competent Speaker" instrument and manual provides an important process model of how to move standards to assessment (Morreale, et.al., 1993). The EPB-"Wingspread" standards were the basis for an evaluation instrument in this model. The process by which this instrument was developed is the process model that can be used in all areas of the discipline, including K-12. If this systematic approach in which SCA sponsored development, approval and dissemination is followed, within a reasonable amount of time, the community will be in a much stronger position to flourish.

However, the entire community will not likely accept the standards or the process. There is nothing to keep individuals or institutions from rejecting the decisions represented by SCA as acceptable discipline-wide practices. There will be attacks on the process and products. The destructive aspect is the threat to a unified position in defending to accreditation agencies and governmental agencies. The constructive aspect is the continuous analysis of the work of the discipline and work toward improvement of the process and strategies for assessment.

While it may be an arrogant position to take, those who are contributing to and participating in the creation and development of assessment of outcomes products are providing evidence for accountability. Those who are not contributing and deny the process need to work within the community and not aloof from it. It is the lack of insight or participation that denies the discipline a strong position in the future of education and ownership of the body of knowledge, skills and evaluation it has proliferated. What the discipline needs for accountability is a consistent message to all external entities at the national, state and institutional levels. Each state association should provide a representative to state agencies who knows the position of the discipline at both the state and national level. A national level representative should keep a representative or group from each state association informed of the critical issue of accountability from the national level. A better dissemination of the discipline's position would be a more proactive stance to solve future problems. The accountability movement requires a new approach to respond for the discipline at all levels of education.

Finally, teacher training must be addressed after K-12 standards and assessment methods are in place. Certification standards that qualify elementary education majors and elementary curriculum directors must be expanded to include teaching or supervising, speaking and listening skills in the Language Arts curriculum. To retrain teachers in the field, currently certified speech communication specialists could become certified consultants and trainers for elementary and middle school teachers. English majors who teach Language Arts curriculum 7-12 must take courses in speaking and listening to be certified. Other innovative plans must be developed, such as the recent innovative approach discussed by Roy Berko (1995) in the November *Spectra*. In Minnesota, Language Arts teachers are now Communicative Arts and Literature teachers.

Perhaps, the phantom K-12 curriculum can become a real curriculum. It is possible through assessment. With the power of the learned society and assessment driving education, it may be

possible to respond powerfully, demonstrating that the discipline is prepared and armed with valid and reliable innovative assessment products to measure outcomes of K-12 speaking and listening skills.

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